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benefits to young composers, it should receive far more attention from British hopefuls than it seems to do at present.

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¹ See my article in *Contact* 26 (Spring 1983), pp.38-40.

² *Contact* 31 (Autumn 1987), pp.39-40

Keith Potter

Musica Nova 1987

Seventh International Festival of Contemporary Music, Glasgow, 13-19 September 1987

Contact has managed to review all Glasgow's seven Musica Nova festivals so far with the exception of the first one, which took place in April 1971. (In 1973 the joint organisers – the University of Glasgow's Music Department and the Scottish National Orchestra – sensibly moved the festival from the spring to the autumn, where it has since stayed; this basically seems a wise decision.) I'm pleased we've done so, since I think these reviews provide a record of an important event in the British new-music calendar of the seventies and eighties. Its history has been charted; the music performed has been examined, in particular the specially commissioned new works by each festival's four Featured Composers; and relevant issues have been discussed. And we've provided a forum for opinions about how such an event should be run and what its value is.¹

And to whom. It's interesting, looking through those reviews, to see just how often the issue of the audience comes up for discussion. Hilary Bracefield, writing about Musica Nova 1984, pinpoints the recent problems particular to the Glasgow festival. And she was to some extent taking off from the more general issues I had raised shortly before in a rather lengthy piece on the Huddersfield Festival, so I'll try not to go over ground that both of us have already travelled in these pages. But the problems of response, both local and national, to such an event must remain central to any debate about the value and purpose of it. Going up to Glasgow last September reopened the debate for those of us inevitably branded as *parachutistes*, while the local population must clearly have a different perspective. (The next Musica Nova review in these pages should probably be by someone based in Glasgow. Though it's interesting to observe that the two reviews we've had by local residents have been less critical of the festival in general than those by outsiders; and neither made an issue of the 'audience problem'. One inevitably falls to speculating on the reasons for this.)

The most disturbing thing to arise from our report on the last Musica Nova was that it was apparently said in 1984 – and said more than once – that the festival existed 'for the benefit of the Scottish National Orchestra itself: to give the orchestra work to get their teeth into, to make sure that they had a chance to perform contemporary music'. Few would be so foolish as to imagine that the market forces which increasingly govern our orchestras in these Thatcherite times allow them to programme contemporary music as a matter of course. The reason usually given for this is that attendances would fall so much that the financial stability of these orchestras, already perilous, would be threatened to the point of disaster. The argument that the players themselves will not get the experience of performing contemporary scores without the special financial effort involved in putting on a separate festival therefore seems sensible, if regrettable.

The argument that the main – or even a main – purpose of an event such as Musica Nova is to benefit the players is, on the other hand, very worrying. Of course their musical education ought to have prepared them far better than it probably did to be technically well-equipped enough and sufficiently open-minded to play a wide variety of contemporary scores, including those that challenge them intellectually. And of course they need the regular experience of rehearsing and performing such music to keep themselves technically and musically 'fit' and abreast of things. But surely the overriding reason for Musica Nova's existence is to bring a wide range of contemporary music – and particularly works that challenge familiar norms and expectations – to the widest audience possible.

It doesn't matter if some of this audience decides that some, or even all, of the music performed in the festival isn't for them. It doesn't even matter if in the end at least a few of the more rebarbatively difficult kinds of new works are abandoned to the 'new-music ghetto': some music undoubtedly belongs there, and there is little virtue in denying it, as Milton Babbitt pointed out 30 years ago. Indeed, few have done more than he has to encourage the debates about both new music and the audience and new music and the orchestra.² Visitors to Musica Nova 1981 had their own chance to decide for themselves whether Babbitt's own music deserves its place in the ghetto when several of his compositions, including two orchestral works, were performed with Babbitt present as Featured Composer. As Stephen Arnold, a lecturer in music at Glasgow University and now one of Musica Nova's three artistic directors, is a leading Babbitt scholar, he is a particularly appropriate person to see that this debate is followed up by the festival itself. But to suggest that any festival should be mounted, especially with public funds, largely for the musical well-being of those who are asked to play in it actually spells out the opinion that any audience for it comes second. That's surely wrong. And it reveals a sad lack of imagination after more than a decade's experience of the problems.

It could, however, be argued that this attitude is simply realist. And, in fact, in focusing attention on the needs of the professionals, Musica Nova is nowadays implementing, whether it realises it or not, the chief recommendation made by Barbara Winrow in her review of the 1976 festival. (As she pointed out, some of the participants that year actually drew up a list of 'positive proposals for the future' and presented them to the festival organisers. I was there myself in 1976 and can remember this being done. One always wonders

exactly what happens to such documents . . .) 'If, she argued, 'in its next incarnation, Musica Nova caters liberally for its future composers – the people, after all, who have scraped together the cost and travelled from all over the country and committed themselves wholly and seriously to the week – then it will have established for itself a strong nucleus with, in fact, an intrinsic long-term interest in promoting the public relations of "new music". If it fails to do this, it risks decaying from within – a common enough fate of new enterprises – and all wider issues will then be irrelevant.'

This, of course, is advocating that more attention be paid to the professional, or would-be professional, composer as opposed to the players of the SNO. To aim at one, though, is not to deny the other attention: they go together very well, since there is always a great need for each side – creators and interpreters – to understand the other better. The idea of making more provision for composers, who have a vested interest in the event's future, seems in any case very sensible. Certainly in all subsequent festivals some effort has been made to attract more student composers, in particular, to Glasgow for this festival-cum-conference. The arrangements for student seminars and workshops, in which the featured composers and students can examine scores and discuss issues, were better in 1979 and 1981 than in 1976, to judge from what I have read and heard. And in 1984 and 1987, the Society for the Promotion of New Music mounted its annual Composers' Forum in conjunction with the festival. The 1987 forum was directed by David Bedford and Nicola LeFanu; I'll say more about it below. Basically this latest move has been beneficial, even though one can describe its effect either altruistically (' . . . Musica Nova's audience enlarged and its value enhanced for the second time by the SPNM forum . . .', as I have put it elsewhere) or more cynically ('The presence of the SPNM delegates disguised the thinness of the rest of the audience . . .', as Bracefield said of 1984).

Just how much has been achieved in those years, though? Winrow's suggestion was, deliberately I think, ambiguous about the nature of the mix between local composers and ones from further afield which should be attempted in order to produce the sort of thriving venture she obviously had in mind. But it's clear that locals, as well as *parachutistes*, are needed to make much impact on the wider local population and persuade it that Musica Nova is an exciting event in the musical calendar that it simply cannot afford to miss. There was, indeed, some effort in 1987 to involve young Scottish composers in particular as well as young composers in general in the Musica Nova Electro-Acoustic Programme. This was an admirable project, allowing a number of composers to spend several weeks in the University Music Department's now quite venerable Electronic Music Studio, directed by Arnold, making pieces to be presented in two lunchtime recitals during the festival week. Participants were students and in the main young, generally less well-known, professionals; several were from Scotland. James Dillon, one of Musica Nova 1987's Featured Composers and actually born in Glasgow, had also originally been invited; because of pressure of work on his orchestral commission for the festival, he unfortunately didn't manage to take part in the project. Tape pieces by two of the other Featured Composers – Toru Takemitsu and Bernd Alois Zimmermann – were, however, included in the

lunchtime recitals.)

The SPNM forum also attracted some local composers, of course. Indeed, I understand that the clientele of this long-established annual event changes noticeably when it 'comes north': the majority of delegates in Glasgow in both 1984 and 1987 were, unsurprisingly I suppose, from Scotland and the north of England. Local professional soloists and ensembles such as the Edinburgh-based New Music Group of Scotland, directed by Edward Harper, as well as amateur forces such as the SNO Chorus, participate regularly in the festival itself. And the Scottish Music Archive makes its presence felt in a number of ways.

The collaboration between Musica Nova and the SPNM would no doubt have pleased Winrow: it has certainly improved the opportunities available for composers during the week (though in the past one could, of course, have gone to the SPNM Composers' Weekend as well as Musica Nova and benefited from each in different ways). I think, though, that she would have probably been somewhat disappointed if, like me, she had returned to Musica Nova after eleven years. There is still, notably, a lack of obvious progress in the SNO's familiarity with, to say nothing of real commitment to, new music, and in the orchestral members' involvement with the festival itself; if Musica Nova really is conceived for the SNO players' benefit, its effectiveness must hence be seriously questioned. The collaboration with the SPNM has brought new problems as well as improvements. And the situation regarding any wider audience for Musica Nova seems dire.

The response of the SNO is, admittedly, rather better than was reportedly the case in 1979, the year when visitors were treated to a splendid opposition between the uncompromising modernism of Brian Ferneyhough and the neo-Romanticism of Robin Holloway, as well as the music of Tona Scherchen-Hsiao and Thomas Wilson. It must have all seemed the same to some of the players, though. Nicholas Bannen reported 'photographs of Holloway and Scherchen-Hsiao retrieved from the SNO centre [sic] dartboard where they had hung impaled like voodoo dolls' and 'expensive orchestral material [that for Ferneyhough's *La terre est un homme*] defaced and in some cases irreparably damaged by players'.

Yet the opportunity, which must be unique in Britain at least, to involve a major symphony orchestra in the major compositional issues of today via interaction with composers – first within the festival and then, following Winrow's admittedly rather optimistic plan, outside it as well – still hasn't fully been seized. I'm in danger, though, of confusing having the debate with winning the argument; and it may of course simply be that 'new music', in most of the senses that *Contact*, say, understands the term, has lost the argument since 1976 to the George Lloyds, not to say the Margaret Thatchers. (The latter is, however, unlikely in Scotland; it's instructive to a southerner to observe how different are the political sensibilities 400 miles north of London.) But it does seem a pity that there is so little evidence of real involvement here. The SNO in fact seemed more tolerant of the new music they were asked to play in 1987 than did their colleagues in the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, which now also participates in the festival. It was depressing to witness just how little sympathy the BBC orchestral players showed, notably towards Dillon's admittedly difficult music, which is possibly rather ungrateful to perform: especially depressing since this orchestra has many

more young players in it than does the SNO, and one expects that something of the work done in our music colleges over the last few years to increase players' understanding of contemporary music would have had an effect on the orchestral profession by now.

It is, though, the SNO's festival, at least in part, and it is the SNO which, under the terms on which Musica Nova was originally set up, could really have benefited by now from the interaction of which I am speaking. The problems are by no means simply due to recalcitrance on the part of performers. The main reason why so little has changed is that the extent and, perhaps even more importantly, the possible nature of that interaction have not been fully explored. As things are currently arranged, there is little or no chance for the orchestral musicians and the large number of composers and other interested parties present at Musica Nova to meet and exchange ideas. Bannen's report on the 1979 festival suggests that there were more opportunities to mix with the musicians that year than there are now. The physical as well as organisational separation of SPNM and SNO events must be a reason for this. Another is the simple fact that SPNM delegates have more organised for them, especially if they have a piece being done, than did student composers at Musica Nova under the old scheme; this means that they have less time, and perhaps inclination, to do more than attend the main concerts. It may be unrealistic to expect either that any 'marriage' would last long or that it would give birth to anything very definable. But it ought not to be beyond the wit of the organisers to think up one or two projects involving at least some members of the orchestra as well as the musicians of the small groups present. If the main purpose – or even a main purpose – of Musica Nova is indeed to benefit the members of the SNO (I wonder how many of them see it that way), then more interaction must be a priority.

As things stand now, the SPNM forum actually acts as a barrier across this line of communication. It can also easily mean that those heavily involved with the SPNM activities have little chance of much encounter with Musica Nova's Featured Composers, though at least one SPNM delegate in 1987 spoke enthusiastically of the opportunities offered simply to be around such famous names as Elliott Carter and had clearly benefited from this in 1984. Of course it's up to the festival and to the Featured Composers themselves, as well as the SPNM organisers and individual delegates, to keep the channels of communication open. The spread of activities physically doesn't, though, help matters. (There was a rumour that the new Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama building – which I saw in the throes of near-completion and part-habitation on my visit to Glasgow: it looks very impressive, by the way – might become the base for a lot of both the SPNM and Musica Nova activities next time; this would at least go some way towards solving the practical problems.)

And the more the composers whose pieces have been selected for rehearsal, recording and possible concert performance by the SPNM-invited ensembles (here the excellent and experienced group Gemini, conducted by Graham Treacher) regard the occasion as simply an opportunity to get a professional performance to take away for the enhancement of their careers, the less the educational function of both the forum and the festival will mean much. I sympathised with those composers who were reportedly the victims of one or two insensitively lengthy attempts at instruction in

such matters as notation at the expense of getting on with the hearing, and indeed recording, of as much of their pieces as time permitted. And there will always be practical obstacles, too: in 1987 a surprisingly short shortlist of works for the final concert was at the last minute rendered virtually irrelevant by the unfortunate indisposition of the soprano, Mary Wiegold, who had been given the lion's share of the work. But perhaps some of the composers underestimate the educational side of the forum's work, and overestimate the extent to which the SPNM either can or should simply function to boost their egos and enhance their careers.

With due acknowledgement to all this, the whole thing is still not pulling together sufficiently to make much difference to relationships within the musical profession, let alone use whatever new understanding can be reached between composers and performers as a catalyst to involve the wider musical community, as Winrow was proposing. A good illustration of this absence of the feeling that things are pulling in the same direction can also serve as a sad reflection on the level of local commitment to the festival. The SNO Chorus participated in an admittedly bizarre programme juxtaposing Takemitsu, Dillon and Edward McGuire (the latter one of the few Scottish composers to have an established reputation south of the border and himself an excellent example of interaction between contemporary music and the wider community, for example in his involvement with the folk group Whistlebinkies). The choir tackled McGuire's *Pipes of Peace* for chorus and piper – an effective piece of 'modern music without tears' – with well-prepared gusto. But the Takemitsu part of the programme was reduced (due to lack of rehearsal time, we were told), and those pieces that were sung seemed to me poorly prepared and entirely lacking the involved feeling of a proper performance. This would have been understandable, if inexcusable, had the music been as difficult and unfamiliar to the singers as, say, Dillon's music obviously was to the BBC SSO. (There is, perhaps fortunately, no Dillon work for large chorus.) But Takemitsu's present harmonic language is very straightforward and familiar – too much so, I'd say, but more of that below – and there was no excuse for not doing his works justice. Is there no way that the SNO Chorus can be made to feel more involved in Musica Nova too?

Eleven years on, then, all too much seems the same to the outside observer. I was amazed once again, like a typical sassenach, at the quantity and quality of music-making that seems to be going on in Glasgow – and Edinburgh too, I'd better add hastily: professional work of a high standard that isn't as much known about in London as perhaps it should be. But new music leads as ghetto-ised an existence in Scotland as it does in so many other places, and Musica Nova seems to emphasise this rather than to be doing much to change things. Perhaps I'm wrong and new music has a lot more going for it during the main season. (There was also a Xenakis festival in Glasgow last spring, of which I heard some good reports.) But the festival's inability to fill even the small SNO Centre for the main orchestral programmes did not suggest this is very likely. The Centre, attractive though it is, actually serves as the orchestra's rehearsal hall and isn't meant for concerts at all. The decision to use it may be severely practical: not only because audiences are expected to be small, but because Glasgow's main concert hall is, I was told, far from ideal. But it also

indicates a lack of nerve, of ambition; of belief, dare one say, in the whole venture. It's hard now to believe that 'In May 1961 . . . there was a packed house in Glasgow for the British premières of Stockhausen's *Gruppen*, Gunther Schuller's *Spectra*, and Thea Musgrave's *Obliques*.'³ But times change, and new music simply isn't as fashionable as it seems it was in Britain during that brief period in the early sixties. And yet to say that is to risk being as defeatist as I've already accused the organisers of Musica Nova of being.

* * *

There was, despite these strictures, some good music to be heard in Musica Nova 1987, as well as opportunities for the usual range of informal encounters for which one always values such an occasion. Of the four Featured Composers this year, one was rather removed from the usual business involved in 'featuring': Bernd Alois Zimmermann is, I think, the first Featured Composer at Musica Nova to be no longer living.

Zimmermann, who committed suicide in 1970 at the age of 52, fell a little awkwardly between the generation of German composers such as Wolfgang Fortner, whose anti-Nazi pedigrees and 'elder statesman' roles permitted their music to survive to some extent the accusations of being old-fashioned, and that of younger avant-gardists, notably Stockhausen, who seems to have viewed Zimmermann as a deadly rival during the fifties and sixties. His compositions do not entirely avoid the problems of this 'in-betweenness', and they range widely and even wildly in both style and quality. Zimmermann has always had a few fervent champions, and two of them – the cellist Siegfried Palm, for whom all the composer's works involving solo cello were written, and the SNO's Principal Guest Conductor and festival artistic director Matthias Bamert – were on hand to make up for this Featured Composer's absence by talking informatively and candidly about him and his output as well as by playing an important part in the performance of an intelligently devised selection of his works. I don't think my view of Zimmermann was much altered as a result of hearing or rehearsing eight of the nine works played during the week. But it was valuable to be able to listen to such good performances of the Cello Concerto (Palm and the SNO under Bamert) and the crazy collage that calls itself *Musique pour les soupers du roi Ubu* (SNO under Richard Bernas, standing in for Oliver Knussen; the latter's presence was stamped all over the programme of Knussen, Turnage and Takemitsu in which the Zimmermann piece appeared). And of the three solo string sonatas – for violin (Sophie Langdon), viola (James Durrant) and cello (Palm again) – which chart the composer's move in the decade before 1960 from the somewhat neo-classical to what the anonymous programme note called the 'transcendental and revolutionary'. Bamert – who is, by the way, for anyone who doesn't yet know it, a very fine conductor and a tremendous asset to Musica Nova – is rumoured to be anxious to do Zimmermann's *magnus opus*, the opera *Die Soldaten*, with Scottish Opera; this rumour should be widely encouraged. (But who in Glasgow is going to go to it?)⁴

Toru Takemitsu is very much alive and well; he is, indeed, on the crest of a wave of popularity just now. But he participated in the business of the festival hardly at all; an odd little impromptu speech – literally inscrutable because largely inaudible – that he

made during the already-mentioned choral concert almost made one wish he had allowed his music to speak entirely for itself, reflected only against the image of the detached oriental figure listeners could observe hovering over the festival as opposed to actually among us. Takemitsu also had his eloquent apologist, however, in the larger-than-life and less than inscrutable form of Knussen, who conducted a public interview with the composer – or, rather, gave a lecture to which Takemitsu appended a few comments – even though he was unable to conduct his scheduled concert. Knussen talked persuasively about what he called the 'Messiaen problem' with Takemitsu's music: the fact that harmonic and colouristic similarities between the work of these two composers tend to deafen listeners, critics particularly perhaps, to the rhythmic and conceptual differences. I've been guilty of this to some extent myself in the past, and I did honestly try to atone for it by attempting to listen to Takemitsu's compositions in the festival with an unbiased ear.

It's certainly possible to hear the pieces in the *Rain* series, for example – *Rain Spell* was played by the New Music Group of Scotland one lunchtime – in the kind of 'Japanese garden' way of which the composer speaks; this is clearly some distance from Messiaen's more rhetorical approach, even if Takemitsu says that these works move towards the 'sea of tonality'. *A Way A Lone II* for string orchestra – played by the BBC SSO under Jerzy Maksymiuk – meets a more functional tonality at least half way, so that even if its concept and rhythmic language are still unMessiaenic, I for one find it disappointing that the music never actually gives what it tonally seems to promise. That isn't a problem with other recent works such as the choral pieces called *Uta*, different songs from which were sung both by Singcircle, in an ill-conceived and lightweight programme that opened the festival, and by the SNO Chorus as already mentioned. 'I don't afraid to use tonal now', said Takemitsu in his endearingly fractured English during the Knussen interview. He's not joking; what's more, these songs are based on tunes written when the composer was eighteen. We are on dangerous ground here, where what I'd call, for want of a better term, true post-modernism has been determinedly and disastrously replaced by pastiche. In these choral pieces and at least some other recent works Takemitsu is, it seems to me, simply rewriting the music of the past rather than creating something new with old materials. It's for that reason that I don't feel wrong to describe *To the Edge of Dream* for guitar and orchestra (played by Manuel Barrueco and the SNO under Bamert) as 'Rodrigo meets Berg', since I couldn't hear the piece on its own terms: it didn't seem to have any 'own terms'. The two brief fanfares commissioned for the festival and premiered in the same programme are pretty nondescript, and not what Musica Nova commissions should be about.

In the absence of major foreign composers able to 'feature' themselves as well as their music (which is an important aspect of the festival and should not be so lacking again), the usual pair of British figures achieved more prominence than usual. Though ten years apart in age, James Dillon and Mark-Anthony Turnage are at more similar stages of their careers and even musical developments than this might imply. Dillon is a late developer and writes the sort of music that takes a long time both to conceive and to compose out. Turnage, while hardly prolific or indeed un-serious about what he does, is fairly precocious and

writes the sort of music that can, in theory, be produced much faster, since it owes a good deal to familiar kinds of material and familiar ways of doing things. Both composers come from working-class backgrounds fundamentally unsympathetic to the kind of culture of which they are now officially part. (Dillon was on home ground in Glasgow, while Turnage was born in Grays, in Essex.) Both have been deeply involved with popular music in the past. Neither is firmly committed to 'establishment' views, however, despite their engagement with the elitist organisations which promote establishment modernism. And though Turnage talks more freely about his background than Dillon, both give the impression of wanting to achieve something in their work that will break right out of the established forms and attitudes of 'serious music', and even break through class distinctions, without being entirely sure how to achieve it. Both have emerged into public view during the 1980s; Dillon is now 37, Turnage 27. Both talked informatively in interview about themselves and their music: Dillon to Roger Wright, Turnage to Robert Maycock.

I was glad of the chance to get some sort of overview of Turnage, since I've heard his music only sporadically over the last few years and have been unsure how to place him. I'm still not sure now, except that I feel he might just be on the verge of something really interesting; whether it's what I alluded to above, I'm again not sure. He professed unease about being a part of the 'new-music scene'; he is currently one of its most fêted younger figures. He gives his pieces titles like *Beating about the Bush* and *Three Screaming Popes* (the latter is for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and due in 1989; it alludes to the triptychs of Francis Bacon – 'by far my favourite painter'), and interprets his own work as a violent cleansing process to purge his angry reaction to his upbringing.

Yet compositions such as *And Still a Softer Morning* for small ensemble seem to be typically and tamely 'stilo SPNMo', to borrow an epithet from one of my new co-editors; and even in *Night Dances* for chamber orchestra – which, like much of Turnage's music, evokes popular sources directly, in this case the samba and Miles Davis – the raw energy implicit in his material is smothered with too much 'good mannerism', too much 'establishment surface'. *And Still a Softer Morning* was played by members of the New Music Group of Scotland, *Night Dances* by the SNO under Bernas. We also heard *Lament for a Hanging Man* for soprano and ensemble in Gemini's evening festival programme, but the intended impact of this must have been seriously affected by the absence of the prescribed lighting effects.

Gross Intrusion, Turnage's festival commission, was played by the SNO under Bamert on the last night. The work's title, another typical Turnage mixture of the musically descriptive and the scatological, comes from a short story by Steven Berkoff; the composer is currently writing an opera on Berkoff's play *Greek*. As the basis for a twelve-minute piece in which lyrical music for strings, some of it drawn from a love duet in the opera, is disrupted four times by violent outbursts of woodwind and brass, the idea is as strong as the title is apt. The division of the string section into seven small groups, one of them amplified, leads to some expertly controlled filigree textures which keep the lyricism from stagnating. Overall, though, I found the work disappointing: the emphasis on line exposes the weakness of Turnage's basic material, and the intru-

sions lack the power to overwhelm as they should. It seemed unnaturally compacted, somehow: perhaps the composer is simply generating material more appropriate to large-scale forms, which bodes well for the opera itself, scheduled for June in Munich, if Turnage can come up with some really strong melodic material.

Of James Dillon there is plenty elsewhere in this issue. So let me confine myself to brief praise for his festival commission, *helle Nacht*, which was also premièred by the SNO under Bamert, this time in its concert at the week's beginning. The title, which in the programme note was translated as 'a lit and lighting darkness', comes from Holderlin's translation of Sophocles and refers to Antigone's burial alive; the relevant image appears to be that of darkness as somehow intensely bright. And this time the piece really does have the seering, seething and violent effect that its title leads a listener to expect. *helle Nacht* (the lower-case 'h' is correct, if irritating) is the second work in a trilogy that began with *Überschreiten*, Dillon's London Sinfonietta commission from 1986; the word, this time from Rilke, translates as 'crossing over' or perhaps even 'transgression'; it will continue with *Blitzschlag* for flute and orchestra (the title here is taken from Jacobus Boehme, whose writings lie behind the whole cycle; it means 'Lightning bolt'). All Dillon's recent music – and this triptych seems in the process of becoming a splendid summation of it – deals with ideas about harmony and timbre derived to some extent from the work of the French composers of the *L'itinéraire* group (Gerard Grisey, Tristan Murail and others). This deep involvement with developing new formal as well as timbral ideas from the basic acoustical properties of the harmonic series has had an enormously beneficial effect on Dillon's work, focusing it and charging it with a new power and directness. The familiar problems are still there: I don't pretend to have followed more than a small part of what is probably going on in one hearing of a substantial, half-hour piece, and I'm really not sure how accurate the performance was. But I feel justified in referring to the work's directness, because it did make an immediate impact on me: not just of sheer volume (though there was that too), but of purposefully directed emotional energy. At the end of the performance of *helle Nacht*, it didn't seem impossible to believe that Dillon's music might yet mean something to more of his fellow Glaswegians.

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So what is to be done about Musica Nova? Arnold, Bamert and Stephen Carpenter (or rather the latter's successor at the SNO, since I've recently learned that he has left) could, of course, somehow find the money and commission, say, Philip Glass, or even George Lloyd (who could be just as expensive these days), hire the biggest hall in town and await the full houses. But I doubt this is the answer; it isn't mine, despite my enthusiasm for Glass, and I'm pretty certain it isn't theirs. Not only would it be difficult for them to raise the necessary cash; it wouldn't solve the long-term problems, which need interaction and the careful nurturing of an eager, but also committed and trusting, audience, not a large, trendy crowd which three years later has moved on to something else. Unless, of course, Musica Nova can predict that 'something else' and carry on cashing in on the latest fashion; but I doubt both its willingness and its capability here.

No: the only solution seems to be to press on, perhaps at least considering the sorts of ideas I've raised in this review. In addition, Musica Nova should make sure that it benefits from increased funding in 1990, assuming that the festival keeps to the present triennial arrangement. For in that year Glasgow will be European City of Culture. The logic and purpose of this designation at present escape me. Apart, that is, from the obvious chance it should give everyone to get decent funding for arts projects in the city. Musica Nova 1990 could be bigger and better than ever before and should therefore raise its sights. Organisers, please note!

¹ See the following: John Kelsall on the 1973 festival, *Contact 7* (Winter 1973-4), pp. 38-41; Barbara Winrow on 1976, *Contact 15* (Winter 1976-7), pp. 40-41; Nicholas Bannen on 1979, *Contact 21* (Autumn 1980), pp. 28-30; the late Bryan Anderson on 1981, *Contact 24* (Spring 1982), pp. 30-31; and Hilary Bracefield on 1984, *Contact 29* (Spring 1985), pp. 47-50.

² See, notably, his articles 'Who cares if you listen?', originally published in *High Fidelity*, vol. VIII, no. 2 (February 1958), pp. 38-40 and 126-7, and reprinted in *The American Composer Speaks*, ed. Gilbert Chase (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. 234 ff. and in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 243-50; and 'On Relata I', in *The Orchestral Composer's Point of View*, ed. R.S. Hines (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), pp. 12-38, reprinted in *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. IX, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 1970), pp. 1-22.

³ Andrew Porter, 'Some New British Composers', in *Contemporary Music in Europe: A Comprehensive Survey*, ed. Paul Henry Lang and Nathan Broder (New York: Schirmer/Norton, 1965), p. 15. (This book reprints essays written for the fiftieth anniversary issue of *The Musical Quarterly* [January].)

⁴ The review was at proof stage when I learned of Bamert's resignation as a director of Musica Nova. This follows the sacking of the SNO's general administrator Stephen Carpenter and Neeme Järvi's resignation as the orchestra's musical director; Bryden Thomson is taking over from Järvi and will probably play an important part in the 1990 festival, but Carpenter had not, at the time of writing, been replaced. Bamert is reported to have been dismayed at the implications of the SNO's current managerial crisis and far from confident that plans for the next festival could be realised. The plans included visits from both Boulez and Stockhausen, who seem unlikely to come without assurances from Bamert, who is highly respected in continental European new-music circles. Glasgow's Musica Nova 1990 seems in peril, European City of Culture or not.

Christopher Fox

A Berlin Diary

1987 was Berlin's 750th birthday, an anniversary that provoked a spectacular year-long programme of cultural activity. I was there for the latter part of the festivities as a guest of the DAAD Berliner Künstlerprogramm (German Academic Exchange Berlin Artists' Programme) which asked only that I 'contribute to the cultural life of the city'. Of that contribution just my concert-going is recorded here: *Contact* has no room for an account of the splendours of the city's cake-shops, of my son's experience of its pre-school educational provision, or of the disturbingly abundant evidence of canine incontinence on its streets. Nor can I present a complete picture of the city's new-music scene: I didn't go to any concerts in the East, not because there weren't any (the GDR's celebration of 750 years of its *administrative* capital were as lavish as the West's), but because crossing the Wall is still sufficiently irksome for my visits to be restricted to a few day-time tourist trips. So what follows is a reflection of the way my curiosity led me to explore an unfamiliar cultural-landscape rather than a representative record of that landscape.

29 September

My first excursion into Berlin's concert life takes me to Kreuzberg, one of the city's more radical districts (its inhabitants were labelled 'anti-Berliners' by the city fathers after riots in the area earlier in the year), to see Rhys Chatham and his massed electric guitarists play in an old *Palais de Danse*. Chatham (b.1952) I know only as a reputation – a proponent of something described as 'art-rock' and a leading light in the New York downtown music scene for the past two decades – and so I seize the chance to add him to my collection of Living Legends of Experimentalism. The reality is rather less impressive than the reputation: the music is brutally over-amplified (my ears ring for the next 36 hours), but not beyond the point where it is possible to tell that Chatham has had only one idea and is sticking to it. His group – six electric guitarists, electric bass and rock drummer – play works covering the last ten years, all using open-tuned guitars and lots of harmonics, articulated in rock-orientated rhythms. The influence of punk rock is unmistakable, but whereas punk at its best coupled acoustic savagery with humour and a certain rough sensuality, Chatham's music is arid and charmless.

1 October

German opera-houses are funded with a generosity appropriate to a country that takes the arts seriously, and they commission new work with an enviable regularity. Tonight it is Berlin's turn, the Deutsche Oper making up for rather a long spell without a new operatic work (although only six years without a commissioned première, Covent Garden!) with the first performance of *Oedipus* by Wolfgang Rihm (b.1952). This is a *big* event, with broadcasts on radio and television, and Rihm's music-theatre (his designation for yet another opera that dare not speak its name) struggles to meet the demands of the occasion.